

Sreten M. Jelić¹

University of Belgrade,
Faculty of Agriculture
Belgrade (Serbia)

Marija D. Popović²

University of Belgrade,
Faculty of Agriculture
Belgrade (Serbia)

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN SERBIA WITH A FOCUS ON RURAL AREAS

ABSTRACT: The rural areas of our country are changing. In recent decades, significant changes have occurred in the structure of the population, households and family farms. Women in rural areas, as part of the population outside the city, are often left out from the impact of positive social and economic changes. Women must be ensured the opportunity to enjoy all the benefits of social protection, social welfare and the use of healthcare services. The paper especially points out the position of women in Serbia with a focus on rural areas, because out of the total population 1,454,919 or 20.24% women live in these areas. Women are increasingly becoming the holders of single and elderly households. Women in rural areas are older than women in urban areas. The participation of older women in local communities, areas and regions of Southern and Eastern Serbia is increasing. Some socio-demographic characteristics show that the position of women has improved, as well as the improvement of rural communities in general, which is conditioned by the resources and the way of life in the countryside.

KEYWORDS: women, position, rural areas, characteristics, Serbia.

¹ sjelic@agrif.bg.ac.rs

² marija.popovic11@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Women represent a significant group of the population, but their needs and problems are usually invisible. Based on some socio-demographic characteristics of the female population of Serbia, the changes that have occurred are evident. Women in rural areas are older than women living in urban areas. The participation of the old population and women living in rural areas is increasing compared to the young.

Women living in the countryside, although they are an invisible workforce, represent development potential in rural areas and play a very significant role in maintaining the development of agriculture and rural areas (Jelić and Popović, 2020).

The educational capital of women in rural areas is low, and the opportunities for acquiring additional knowledge and skills are extremely scarce. Under the pressure of work and obligations, women in rural areas are poorly motivated to act more actively in the labour market. Positive changes in the educational structure of the female population, primarily during the transition period, have contributed to the reduction of the share of illiterates and the improvement of the educational structure. Differences in the educational structure of women are especially pronounced between rural and urban areas by regions, districts, local communities and settlements.

It is necessary to emphasize that the position of women in rural areas in terms of their freedom and right to freely choose their life priorities is changing because the entire society is changing, especially the concept of patriarchy in families. Certainly, a big problem is the insufficient appreciation of women's efforts and work on farms, because they often work up to 15 hours, but no one records it and they do not get personal recognition for it. However, women in rural areas are increasingly opting for independent entrepreneurship in the form of tourism, catering, various crafts, and in that field, they are achieving significant success and results. They can be very important actors and the driving force behind the development of rural areas.

RESULTS OF THE PAPER AND DISCUSSION

In recent decades, and particularly during the transition period, significant changes in the structure of the population have occurred in Serbia. Our country is one of the oldest nations in the world where the average age of population is over forty years old and with a particularly high proportion of old people (over 65 years old). The deterioration of demographic trends is particularly expressed by the aging index, which represents the ratio of the population over 65 years and of the population under 19 years old. According to the data from the 2011 population census, the average age of women in rural areas is 44.9 years, which is 2.2 years more than women in the city. The number of women living in rural areas is smaller than the number of women in urban areas, and the dominant difference is the larger number of women over 65 in the village than in the city. These

data point to the fact confirming the thesis that in rural areas there is an increasing number of elderly people and limited working capacity of the population, while the share of young people is smaller and the working female population is decreasing.

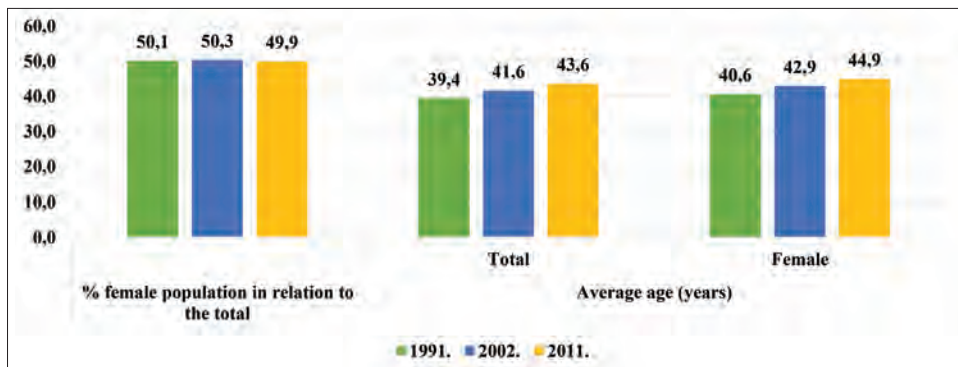
Changes in the values of the basic indicators of population age indicate that demographic aging was still faster in the urban population. The causes of the more intensive aging of the urban population should be sought in the character of the migration flows that were present in the period 1991-2011. During the 1990s, the wave of refugees was primarily directed towards urban areas which, considering the age structure of the refugees, influenced the acceleration of the aging process of the total population in the cities.

The main feature of the gender structure of the population of the Republic of Serbia, viewed by age, is the numerical dominance of men among the younger population, and the numerical dominance of women among the middle and old population. Men are more numerous until the 40-44 age group, in which group the number of men and women becomes equal. In all other age groups, women are more numerous, and their numerical dominance becomes more pronounced with age (Mitrović, 2015). Rural areas are dominated by a mature and elderly population. The largest share in the total rural population is the age group of 30-49 (accounting for 25.22%), followed by the category of 56-64 (accounting for 23.21%), and the concerning fact is that a fifth of the total rural population is made up of people over 65 years old. The continuous aging of the population of Serbia has been present for a long period of time, and constitutes one of the biggest problems in the country. The data show that the older population mostly lives in rural areas of Serbia, while the younger population lives in urban areas. The intensity of migration of the female population is primarily a consequence of education, employment, marriage, but also a greater representation of the female population (from other areas) from the republics of the former Yugoslavia (Jelić and Jovanović, 2018).

In relation to the total population of the country, women make up 51.3% of the total population. There is a higher proportion of women in the middle-aged and old population. In single households, women are represented by 60%, and in elderly households whose bearers are 65 and older, almost three quarters are women (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2017). In rural areas, 20.24% of the total population are women. As women's life expectancy increases, so does the share of women in rural areas.

Changes in the gender structure of the country's total population took place in the direction of reducing the difference in the number of male and female population. There are significant regional differences in the full structure of the population. In a large number of the municipalities, women are more numerous than men. Migration as a factor in the formation of the gender structure of the total population was of particular importance, especially in the period 1991-2011, or the transition period (Chart 1).

Chart 1. Structure of the female population in rural areas in Serbia in the period 1991-2011



Source: Census of population, households and dwellings in 2002, Gender and age: data by settlements, RZS, Belgrade, 2003; Census of population, households and dwellings in the Republic of Serbia in 2011, Population, age and gender, data by settlements, Belgrade, 2012, pp. 42-43, author's calculation.

In rural areas, according to the data of the 2011 population census, the proportion of male population is higher than that of female population. The structure of the population according to age and gender shows that the population in the younger period of life, or up to 29 years of age, is continuously decreasing, while the population of both genders after 50 years of age records growth. On the basis of the mentioned characteristics, the increasing participation of elderly residents in rural areas can be observed (Table 1).

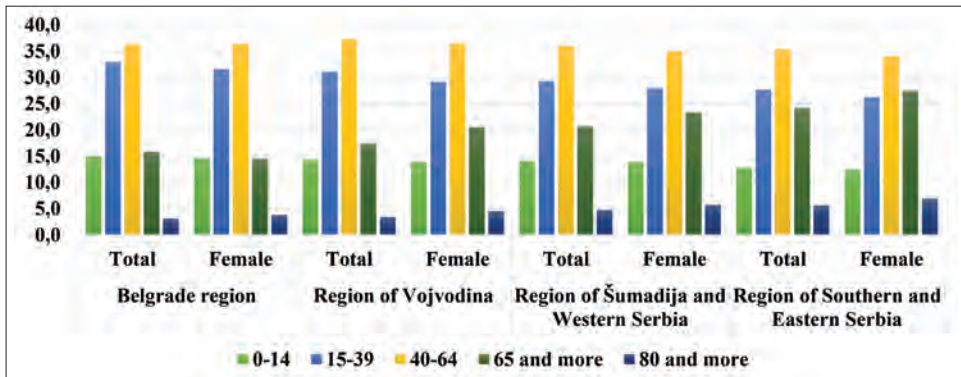
Table 1. Structure of the total population by age and gender in rural areas in Serbia in 2011

Age		0 – 14	15 – 19	20 – 24	25 – 29	30 – 49	50 – 64	65 and more	Total
2011	Total	13,92	5,7	5,97	5,9	25,22	23,21	20,08	100,00
	Male %	7,15	2,94	3,14	3,16	13,21	11,84	8,65	50,09
	Female %	6,77	2,76	2,83	2,74	12,01	11,37	11,43	49,91

Source: Census of population, households and dwellings in the Republic of Serbia in 2011, Population, age and gender, data by settlements, RZS, Belgrade, 2012, author's calculation.

Differences can be observed both between regions and in the gender structure in rural areas (Chart 2). The highest average age of women is in the south and east of Serbia, where at the same time there is the smallest share of the female population under the age of 14 is and the largest share of the population over 65 years of age, with an emphasis on the fact that there is the largest share of women over 80 years old compared to other regions. The largest number of women in rural areas live in Šumadija and Western Serbia, while the smallest number of them live in other areas of Belgrade region.

Chart 2. Age structure of the population in rural areas by region in Serbia in 2011



Source: Census of population, households and dwellings in the Republic of Serbia in 2011, Population, age and gender, data by settlements, RZS, Belgrade, 2012, author's calculation.

FEMALE EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

Education is a very important factor in the development of society, as well as in the improvement of women's life in rural areas. We have already reviewed the position of women in rural areas, but it should be noted that there have been changes throughout the history of women's education in the rural areas. In the past, the education of the female population was not given much importance. Their own life was predicted through the process of training for work on the farm, acquiring knowledge necessary for a housewife and marriage. There were exceptions where female children were sent to school only for the purpose of finding them a better husband in the future. Women's education is undergoing a long-term transformation process, so today there are more and more highly educated women who came from the countryside, which is a consequence of the modernization of society, changing the patriarchal ways of observing the female population in the countryside and numerous global changes. Certainly, there are still rural areas where the female population's education is treated in the same way as before. The share of illiterate persons in the total population today amounts to almost 2%. The total number of illiterate persons has decreased by about 100,000 in the last ten years, from as many as 232,925 according to the previous census to 127,463. Positive changes in literacy of the population of Serbia in the long run, and particularly in recent years, have significantly contributed to the reduction of the share of illiterate persons, and thus to the reduction of differences compared to the countries with the lowest share of the illiterate.

Between the population in urban and rural areas, there are certain differences in the structure of illiterate persons according to gender. In rural settlements in 2002, there were 9.92% illiterate women, or 6 times more than men. According to the 2011 census female illiteracy decreased to 5.48% (Table 2).

Table 2. Population according to literacy by gender in rural areas 2002-2011. in Serbia

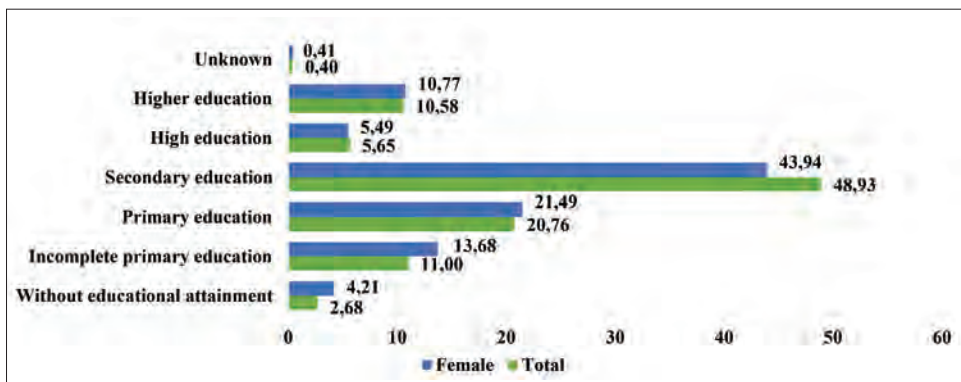
Type of settlement	2002.			2011.		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Other settlements						
Illiterate	173.849	26.175	147.674	87.762	14.975	72.787
Illiteracy rate	5,90	1,79	9,92	3,31	1,13	5,48

Source: Census of population, households and dwellings in 2002, Population, Level of Education and Literacy, data by municipalities, RZS, Belgrade, 2003, p. 16. Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in 2011 in the Republic of Serbia, Population, Level of Education, Literacy and Computer Literacy, Data by Municipalities and Cities, RZS, Belgrade, 2013.

The educational structure of the population in the city and other settlements indicates the existence difference, primarily between regions and areas. The largest percentage of inhabitants without school is in the region of Šumadija and West Serbia, about 36%, and the lowest percentage is in the Belgrade region, which is understandable because education in the area of Belgrade is more accessible, as well as better infrastructural equipment than in other regions of Serbia. The population with completed secondary education is almost equally represented in all regions, which would mean that this type of schooling is the most represented and common in all regions of Serbia (Jelić and Jovanović, 2018).

The structure of the female population aged 15 and over by professional qualifications indicates that there are 34.43% women without any formal education, with incomplete primary education and with primary education, 48.93% have secondary education while 16.23% of women in Serbia have college and university education (Chart 3).

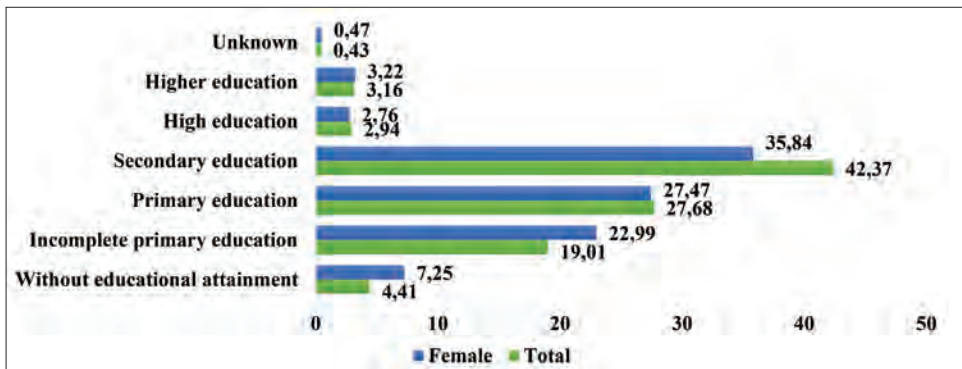
Chart 3. Female population aged 15 and over according to professional qualifications in Serbia in 2011



Source: 2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia, Population, Level of Education, Literacy and Computer Literacy, Data by Municipalities and Cities, RZS, Belgrade, 2013, pp. 34-35, calculation of the author.

In rural areas, 51.9% of the total population has no formal education, has incomplete primary education and primary education. Moreover, 42.37% of the population has secondary education, while 6.1% of the population have college and university education. The share of women without education, with incomplete elementary school and primary education is 57.72% in relation to the total population of rural areas aged 15 and over. There are 35.84% women with secondary education in rural areas and 5.98% with high and higher education. According to the above-listed data, there is a larger share of women with no education, with incomplete primary education and with primary education in relation to the total population of the age of 15 and over in rural areas. In addition, there is a smaller share of women with secondary, college and university education in relation to the total population of rural areas aged 15 and over (Chart 4).

Chart 4. Female population aged 15 and over according to professional qualifications in rural areas in Serbia, 2011



Source: 2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia, Population, Level of Education, Literacy and Computer Literacy, Data by Municipalities and Cities, RZS, Belgrade, 2013, pp. 34-35, calculation of the author.

The educational characteristics of the population in rural areas are unfavourable, and the chances for the improvement of the educational structure is limited by a number of obstacles. More than half of the rural residents aged 15 and over do not have primary school education at all or have completed only primary school. The availability of schools and contents in rural areas is extremely unfavourable and constitutes a substantial obstacle in the improvement of the educational structure in these areas.

One of the issues of the future development of the agriculture sector is the rather unfavourable age and educational structure of the agricultural workforce. This problem is significant from the aspect of the rural area social structure and in terms of the capacity of human resources for adopting new technologies, changing the production structure and many others (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, 2014). Considering the educational structure of the population, the changes occurring in the surveyed period, as well as still unfavourable tendencies with underdeveloped agricultural potential, out-of-date machines and underdeveloped infrastructure, school availability etc., are

slowing down not only modernization and development of agriculture, but also other activities, rural development and development of certain regions and areas. Successful revitalization of rural areas implies reformation of agrarian structures.

QUALITY OF LIFE AND ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES FOR WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

It is generally known that the quality of life and the availability of services of state institutions are poorer in rural areas than in the cities. Spatial and geographical distance is one of the factors that discriminates rural areas in terms of access to these services compared to urban areas. Mobility of women, the information they have, or personal determination for the necessity of some social service also affect the level of use of these services for women in rural areas. Women who live in rural areas and work in agriculture are subject to the risk of discrimination and that is why it is necessary to take the necessary measures in order to improve their position. The most significant factor leading to discrimination is the fact that they live in underdeveloped areas and have no rights in the process of making important decisions. They are not given the opportunity to manage assets, and 60% of women in rural areas have no pension insurance at all. A woman's working day in the countryside, as it has already been mentioned in the paper, lasts about 15 hours because their work does not include only the jobs considered exclusively female, but also doing all the jobs done by men – hard physical work and often taking care of older family members. Women frequently suffer physical and psychological abuse and have difficulty in deciding whether to report it. The position of women in the countryside is unfavourable, and their access to services for the establishment of economic participation is limited.

Among women in rural areas there are more work-inactive and unemployed compared to men, with the ratio of 55% women to 39% men. Participation of employees in non-agricultural sectors is significantly low, i.e., 20% women and 34% men; the participation of women in agricultural work is high and amounts to 56.6%, while employment mainly refers to women's jobs within households. In addition, a large number of women have the status of auxiliary members of the household.

The majority of the female population in urban areas is made of pensioners. Children and young people in the countryside understand that moving to the city is the fastest way to leave bad living conditions, providing them with better opportunities for social inclusion and a higher and better level of education, which is the reason for a larger number of pupils and students in the city. In other settlements, housewives as part of the population are subordinated to the household chores and care of their family members. Inactive people in rural areas are primarily women engaged in raising children or looking for work outside the village.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN ON THE FARM AND IN THE HOUSEHOLD IN RURAL AREAS

A woman in rural areas who lives in a family has a more favourable social position and is an active participant in production on the farm and the carrier of household chores. The most important role of a woman is motherhood or parenting, i.e., taking care of and raising children. A woman also has a role in children's upbringing and education, while at the same time she performs the function of a housewife and the function of an agricultural producer. The woman is the main worker in the rural household, and the household is the unit of consumption.

According to the division of labour into men's and women's jobs in rural areas, all jobs related to the household are entirely left to women. Jobs in the agricultural household are different from those in non-agricultural households because the household and agricultural farm are part of the form used to express economic functions of the family in the countryside. The position of women as wives in rural areas is not determined solely by economic dependence on the husband. Many factors before marriage and in family life affect the position of a woman as a wife. Women gradually become carriers of agricultural production on individual farms, because men, if they do not leave the farm, are professionally oriented towards non-agricultural activities. Thus, women are active farmers on individual farms and in some regions, they even make up more than half of the agricultural workforce.

Women as agricultural producers do not participate equally in all areas of agricultural production. Women participate more in animal husbandry than in tillage. Poultry farming is an exclusive area of their activities. In this existing division of labour, women in rural areas are suited to agricultural production that is related to economic yards, which allows them occasional interruptions in work during the working day, so that they can perform be housewives and agricultural producers at the same time. On the farms with the area of more than 8 ha, the participation of women in agricultural work is lower than that of men due to the fact that such farms have more male workers who are oriented towards agricultural production. Therefore, women's work in relation to men's work is the most significant on poor individual farms and declines proportionally to the size of the farm. Despite intensive involvement in agricultural production, which classifies them as full rather than helping members of the household, these women are in most cases excluded from decision-making regarding production. In most cases, their work takes place in the conditions of small and medium-sized farms with mixed, non-specialized production and with scarce means of production. These working conditions make their position even more unfavourable. Women have the opportunity to plan production and make some decisions when it comes to agricultural production as a supplementary economic activity, and when other members of the household are employed outside the farm.

In most households, budgets are centralized and usually controlled mainly by male members of the household. Women can use the household money for everyday

consumption. When they need money for personal needs, half of the women in the sample are forced to ask for it from other (mostly male) household members, while one third of them manage to provide their personal funds for such purposes. This personal money is often put aside by women who sell agricultural products or work for other households.

Based on the survey that covered 800 female respondents, the following data were obtained in the rural areas of Vojvodina. The respondents are most often married with children (44.4%), or live in the extended family (26.1%), while 10.9% of them live with their parents. There are 5.9% women in single households. Only a small number of women live in extramarital union (1.7%) or are married but have no children (5.3%). Extramarital union is most common among the youngest women (2.6%). As many as 15.2% women from the oldest surveyed category live alone. Over 70% of the respondents live with the children in the household. They most often live with two children (37.4%) or with one child (26.8%). However, as many as 40.1% of women from the oldest group live without children in the household, as well as 44.7% of women with the highest education. It can be assumed that in these cases, the respondents' children have already grown up and established their own households (Blagojević, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The complexity of the demographic processes faced by our country has not bypassed rural areas. Significant structural changes have occurred in the structure of the population, especially the reduction of the population, regional disproportions, the increase in the share of the elderly and reduction in the share of young people, etc. Out of the total population, the participation of women is slightly higher, but 20.24% of women out of the total population live in rural areas. There is a larger share of middle-aged and older women. The age structure of women is unfavourable because as women's age increases, their share in the total and rural population also increases. In the region of South and East Serbia, the women's age structure is particularly unfavourable.

The largest share of women in rural areas have secondary school education. The educational structure of women in rural areas indicates differences between the city and rural areas settlements, differences between regions, areas, municipalities and local communities. With the increasing age, the educational structure of the female population in rural areas is more unfavourable. The female population of rural areas differs largely by educational and age groups. The educational capital of women living in rural areas is low, and opportunities for acquiring additional knowledge and skills are extremely scarce, while due to the pressure of work and obligations women are poorly motivated to take active part in the labour market. Women in rural settlements earn less than men in the household, but it is a fact that a large number of women contribute to the family budget.

It is necessary to ensure that women in rural areas use all the benefits of social protection, healthcare and family planning services. Women in rural areas rarely visits

healthcare institutions. Almost half of them will see a doctor only when they are ill. There is not sufficiently widespread awareness of the need for prevention among the rural population.

Opportunities to improve the position of women, as well as the improvement of rural communities in general, are conditioned both by resources and by the way of life in the countryside, because these are the frameworks within which specific activities and development policies should be implemented.

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